

THE BAUBLE

A Story of the Captains Three

BY ROY NORTON

Drawings by Armand Both

WE were walking along the narrow pavement of the Rue Bonaparte, Colonel Dunois and I, when his demeanor changed from one of kindly old age to extreme indignation. We had paused idly in front of a curio dealer's shop window, where, beneath struggling gasjets, a tray was exposed which contained decorations and medals and in the heart of it rested a cross

of the Legion of Honor sold by some unappreciative one. I heard the Colonel's curse and the hard rap of his stick on the stones and looked for the cause.

It was apparent. Above the tray was a facetious sign, "A Few Baubles for Sale."

Even as my eyes caught it the veteran had whirled toward the door, and I followed. He was leaning over the counter and with upraised cane threatening the curio dealer, who, with hands protecting his head from an impending blow, was cowering back against the wall. The old soldier was exhausting a remarkably complete vocabulary of invective and demanding that the cross of the Legion be taken from the window forthwith and sold to him.

"Give it to me, swine!" he thundered. "Quick! How much?"

He threw the price demanded on the counter, thrust the decoration into his pocket, scorned the proffered change, and stalked to the door. He turned back as if to heap a final list of oburgations on the dealer's head, his white eyebrows drawn into a fierce scowl and his white mustache and imperial quivering with anger, and then, as if recovering self possession, walked out. We got as far as the Rue Beaux Arts before he said anything to me, and there, under the light at the corner, he faced me.

"Bauble! Bauble! He called it a bauble!" he stormed, shaking a lean finger in my face. "You too should resent it! Anyone should resent it! It was my right to cane him! He got off light! Lepard would have killed him for that!"

From what I had heard of that reckless member of the Captains Three, I believed it possible.

"He calls it a bauble, the cross that brave men have paid for with their lives! Men of all nationalities—Ah! an American among them—have—"

He caught my look of inquiry and, abruptly thrusting his arm through mine, started up the street toward the Café du Priée.

"I'll tell you of that gallant soul. Strange I should never have told you before how Captain Brownelle came to be one of us."

ONCE in the corner of the café, beneath the paintings on the panels where impecunious art students long gone or arrived at fame had, with priceless treasures of the brush, paid their bills, he calmed to a reminiscent vein and told me of the American wanderer. Two angora cats and the fat proprietress dozed at the little counter in the outer room; so we were alone. The noise of traffic in the narrow old street had died away and a profound quiet was with us as if he had brought it for the telling of the tale, into which he plunged without preliminary:

"It was at the beginning of that disastrous war with Germany, wherein, smarting from the memory of the ill fated strife of previous years which had cost us Alsace-Lorraine, we fought to a draw. With its history you are familiar; but not with the story of Captain Frederic Brownelle.

"There was little of the officer in his appearance on the day I first met him outside of Poissy, where the armies of France and Germany were massing for what was to be one of the most terrific of modern battles. I had been doing staff duty with General Merthier, and was sent with a war automobile to a little hamlet some fifty miles to the rear carrying despatches which were of considerable importance. I had reached the very outpost of the army, when the machine went wrong, and it took less than five minutes to convince me that my chauffeur was hopelessly ignorant of its mechanism. He lifted the hood and started all sorts of foolish investigations, and with each failure to get results my impatience grew. Another five minutes passed, and I was beginning to cast about for some man to send back to headquarters for a fresh machine, when a clean cut fellow in a private's uniform joined the little group, hesitated a moment, and attracted my attention.

"If *Monsieur le Capitaine* will permit," he said, "perhaps I can assist him."

IT was not the wording that interested me so much as the man's accent, and for an instant I studied him, wondering from what nationality he came. He was one of the most perfect specimens of soldier that I have ever seen. His lean face, close cropped mus-

tache, and gray eyes might have betokened either Russian, American, or German parentage; but that he was there in a French uniform and apparently had some relief to offer was for the moment sufficient.

"I understand engines," he said, "better, I believe, than your chauffeur."

"Then see what you can do," I replied curtly; for I was not in very good humor. He threw off his tunic and cap, rolled up his sleeves, and went at it. In less than five minutes he had accomplished what the chauffeur had failed to do. He was giving my driver some instructions what to do in case of a similar emergency, when a Captain of Hussars with whom I was acquainted came galloping up and halted beside us.

"Why don't you send your man back," the Captain said, on learning the difficulty, "and take this other man to run your machine, Captain Dunois? He belongs to my company."

"You can imagine my relief when I accepted a new chauffeur, and a moment later, the change effected, I was being whirled toward my destination at hair raising speed. When I was not hanging on the sides of the tonneau, I put in the time watching the square, competent shoulders of the man before me. The more I looked at him, the more I admired his appearance. As I said before, I was impressed with the fact that, in this regard at least, he was the ideal soldier.

"I was detained but a minute at my destination, where I delivered my despatches and received others which I was to carry across the stretch of fields to General Merthier. Again we whizzed over stretches of good road where my man turned the machine loose, or swung over rough places where we bounced from side to side, or tore through hamlets with the big siren screaming a warning as we passed. We drove directly to General Merthier's headquarters, and in all that time had not exchanged a half-dozen sentences. When I came out of the tent to dismiss my volunteer, I emerged so suddenly that I surprised him. I must have had a flash of inspiration mingled with suspicion; for I gave him the officer's salute, the salute that one equal gives another in our service.

"*Sacré!* He was surprised, taken off his guard in fact. Before he had time to think, he had saluted me as my equal and an officer. Instantly he realized his mistake. I saw him bite his lip with annoyance.

"What is your name and where do you belong?" I asked, studying his face.

"Brownelle, Sixty-fourth Hussars, Corps du Loire."

"There was not the slightest hesitation in his answer and nothing in the fearless, candid eyes to cause me to doubt him, and yet that unexpected salute and subsequent flash of embarrassment prompted me to have this man placed where I could learn more of him. Indeed, we already had ample proof that the army of France had been mysteriously honeycombed with German spies.

"I need a man like you," I said. "Perhaps you would not object to a change of companies?"

"Not in the least, Captain. I am in the service of France."

"Very well," I replied, "I will attend to it. You may go now."

"This time he punctiliously saluted me as a superior, 'bout faced, and walked away.

"I lost no time in having Private Frederic Brownelle transferred, and then, to make doubly sure of having him under my espionage, made him my orderly. He was perfect. Moreover, in the Battle of Poissy he fiercely fought, and all doubts as to his loyalty were cleared away. When the two big armies, after that day's terrific struggle, sullenly drew back to reorganize themselves, I found that Brownelle had sustained a wound, slight but painful, which he had not mentioned. I wanted him to go to the hospital tent; but he grinned and declined, and was absent barely long enough to have his hurt dressed. I had been on duty, unrelenting and trying,



We Were Climbing at a Dizzy Rate When They First Fired.

for thirty-six hours, and in all that time he had been at my elbow uncomplaining.

IN times like those it is difficult to keep track of the days and hours; but I think it was the next night that I really became acquainted with Brownelle. I had worked until the hour was late and the camp around me had long gone to rest. The rumble of cannon changing position, the movement of men making new formations, and the scurry of battle excitement had died away and a white moon made a picture of the night. On pretext of inquiring into the condition of his wound, I called my orderly into my tent and, putting myself on a basis of familiarity, motioned him to be seated. Further to put him at ease, I gave him a cigar.

"Brownelle," I began, "what is your nationality?"

"Purposely I made my question blunt. He jumped to his feet so suddenly that the campstool on which he had been sitting fell backward in a crumpled heap. His face became cold and severe.

"Has *Monsieur le Capitaine* a reason for interrogating me?" he asked with chill dignity.

"More than ever I was convinced that the man was a gentleman and that he knew I had no right, aside from the good of the service, to put such a question. I too rose and, with my knuckles on the edge of my camp table, looked at him across the little shaded light. 'Pardon me,' I hastened to explain. 'I had no right to ask you that question outside of a purely friendly interest. You will pardon me further for saying that it is quite evident to me that you are a trained military man, and that somewhere, at some time, you have worn shoulder straps.'

"It was like a challenge to the truth. For quite a long moment we stood there staring into each other's eyes; I curiously waiting his answer, and he scrutinizing me as if to assure himself that my motives were those of disinterested friendliness. I extended him an open palm across the table.

"Again, I say, pardon me," I went on more softly, "and, Brownelle, if you wish, I will retract that question."

"Impulsively he clasped my hand, and then, as if at last glad to have a confidant, threw aside all reserve and in one speech said, 'I am an American. I graduated from West Point with honor. I gained the rank of Captain in the army of the United States, and I sacrificed influence, friends, and career for—'

"Confused and at a loss for words, he stopped and stood looking at his feet. In the shadow of the light,

I could see that his face was twisting with emotion.

"Ah," said I, "my friend, it was for a woman!"

"He looked up at me as if grateful for my divination, as if grateful that I had spared him necessity for further explanation of his preceding words. 'It was,' he slowly assented; 'but, Captain, I swear to you, as man to man, and friend to friend, that I have never been delinquent in duty, recalcitrant in trust, unfaithful to a comrade, or besmirched in reputation! Is that enough? Is it any bar to your regard that I cannot tell you details? Is it sufficient for me to say that I, trained as a soldier and a soldier by instinct, embittered by thought, and harried by memory, came here to France and enlisted as a private, because I wanted to forget?'"

"I walked around the intervening table and for quite a long time held his hand in mine. He was so boyish, so young, to have been ground under the wheels of the unkindly juggernaut of Fate! There was no lie in his eyes. I knew that he had told me the truth, and that whatever was written in that closed chapter of his unhappy life was not by fault of his own. I was embarrassed and in one sense sorry that I had taken advantage of my superior position to probe his misery. I walked rather ostentatiously back to my seat, and he, picking up his campstool, sat down on it and leaned forward with elbows on knees in a sort of listless attitude as if suddenly wilted by his impulsive confession. I spoke commonplaces, the kind of thing a sympathetic man always does to one who is suffering, commonplaces of encouragement which sounded very hollow and empty when his situation was considered.

"I rather think his emotions got a little the best of him. I am certain they did when I dismissed him, told him to go to his tent, and stood out there in the moonlight, again giving him my hand. I recall that we were both so choked up that we did not bid each other goodnight. Whenever I fight with sentiment, I lose.

AH, that was a disastrous campaign! You remember how we beat the enemy off; but, through old Merthier's fumbling, failed to follow up our advantage and invade the heart of Germany? You remember how our dilatory methods and the German mobility enabled the enemy almost to encompass us a month later in the very heart of Alsace? But your histories don't tell how darkly the lucky star of France went into an eclipse. Listen and I'll tell you something that isn't generally known.

"So effective were those new German weapons put out by the Krupps that in the first ten days of that engagement France had not a dirigible balloon left at its command. Worst of all, the guns on which we had depended for high elevation proved but partly effective, and the Germans were left with war balloons which soared above us and laid bare every secret of our strength. There were two of them that daily swept high above our camps like huge buzzards waiting our demise. Day after day we tried in vain to explode them. Day after day, in swift circles, they marked our position, and we knew that the secret of reinforcements on the way to strengthen our weakened army would sooner or later be exposed to them. Those two blots that at intervals crossed the blue of the sky were more menacing to us than all the German spies that could possibly have been interjected into our army.

"It was Villalon who proposed that daring escapade for which we Captains Three received more honor, I believe, than was our due. With a very mysterious air he came to my tent one night, accompanied by Lepard, who was tugging away at his imperial and smiling with a certain zest that told me plainer than words that some new adventure was ripe. We drew together over my little table, and to insure secrecy and freedom from interruption I had Brownelle stand without the tent door.

VILLALON'S plan was so daring that it almost took my breath away. It was that we three, entirely at our own risk, should actually invade the German lines and try to secure possession of one of their dirigibles! *Nom de Dieu!* It was foolhardy enough, and I don't think that I should have consented, had we not, in our reckless youth, undertaken equally perilous things and won by our very brazenness. It was certainly the very last venture the enemy might suspect or believe possible. In that alone was its greatest chance for success.

"I think, in our eagerness, we must have raised our voices; for when Villalon exclaimed, 'If only we knew more about petrol engines!' I saw a sudden movement at the tent door. Brownelle had stepped inside and was standing at salute but entreating me with his eyes. Villalon and Lepard turned round in their seats and frowned at him inquiringly; but I understood.

"You are familiar with those also, aren't you, Captain?" I asked, and brought him into the counsel, making explanations that at once put him on a friendly basis with my comrades. He was and, moreover, was eager to accom-

pany us on our harebrained enterprise. Before we four finished the evening we had decided to attempt it.

"Old Merthier thought me insane when I told him what I proposed to essay. Before he could say no I asked for three men of my own selection to accompany me. I was wise enough not to tell him that I should choose two such invaluable officers as Villalon and Lepard; but he may have suspected that it would be they, for he winked dryly when I bade him *au revoir*.

OUR plan depended upon its simplicity, and it worked out exactly as we wished, with the most ridiculous ease. Stupid, simple folks, those Germans! We skirted the entire scene of combat, altered our dress and appearance to fit our project, and—behold!—one day four seemingly half intoxicated roisterers, arm in arm, invaded the German camp, to the amusement of the outposts, and demanded that they be allowed to enlist. Sturdy men from Strasbourg we, who wished a hand in teaching the French a lesson! Very simple men, indeed! Why, Lepard, who was really born in Alsace, had the effrontery to insist that he meet the commanding General himself, and asked the recruiting officer what his first name was.

"We were a camp joke before we had been there an hour. We committed all sorts of indiscretions, such as objecting to the tents assigned us and wandering into all sorts of forbidden places; but our ignorant curiosity took the wildest form when we visited the dirigibles, of which, to our happy surprise, we found the Germans had only two left. Evidently our own gunnery had not been so bad after all!

"One of the men guarding them was a kindly fellow who laughed at our *faux pas* and in a most friendly way permitted us to look at the machinery of which we stood in such evident awe. I saw that Brownelle was taking in every detail and caught a satisfied twinkle in his eyes. We promised the guard to drop around and see him again sometime—a promise that we kept at least halfway. Personally I have never met the gentleman since. On our meandering return to our tents we decided that, inasmuch as absolute recklessness had so far befriended us, it was safer to strike at once. Brownelle, who by this time had been accepted as an equal by all of us, suggested that we try that very night. And we did.

"A heavy, low lying fog had dropped down, dense as that of London in an inhospitable season. It muffled everything and shadowed the sentries with huge distortions. We adopted the very busiest time of the evening, when the camp was widely awake, for our enterprise, knowing that no one would expect such open daring at the hour immediately following supper and that we could then pass more easily from tent to tent and up to the dim hulks that loomed monstrous in the night. A rope had been stretched around them and the guard augmented.

"We engaged the first sentry in conversation, and

before he had answered our first question he had been silently thrown, gagged, and bound, while Villalon, after borrowing his coat and cap, took up his beat. Lepard and I dragged him into the shadows beside the machine, and the same tactics were adopted with a second and a third sentry.

"Our fourth capture was nearly disastrous; for the man started an outcry and we were compelled to strike him to the ground. Following Brownelle's plan, we Captains Three took up the sentry duty while he disappeared in the direction of the dirigibles. It seemed to me that we were kept waiting a year before he called us, and then we hurried over and took our places in the spiderlike frame of the car, where he sat with his hands on the engine throttles.

I DOUBT if anyone can appreciate the agonized intensity of that moment when we cut the anchor lines and heard the first sharp sputtering of the exhaust. On all sides men began to come toward us through the murk, idly as yet, and amazed that the dirigibles should be sent out on such a night. We lifted quite rapidly from the ground when the sliding planes caught the motion, as the dirigibles were balanced so precisely that, although they would lift slowly without the aid of the planes, they would speed upward when driven forward. It was this German perfection, assisted by Brownelle's knowledge, that saved us. And he did have knowledge, although it was a month before we knew that he had been an expert aeronaut in that wonderful little American army.

"From a large tent nearest the dirigibles came a sudden wild outcry of shouts and guttural oaths. It was made distinctly audible that these were the men of the German aerial corps, and we congratulated ourselves; for had we known that they were in such close proximity we might have hesitated in our enterprise and thereby lost. Again the daring of ignorance had helped us. We were a full fifty meters in the air before the aviators took the alarm, and had gained a hundred meters and were climbing skyward at a dizzy rate when the first rifle was fired.

"Pzing! Ps-s-st! A bullet ripped through one of the compartments and the confined gas from that narrow section was rushing forth.

"Don't mind that!" the American yelled in English. 'It's only a little perforation of one compartment,' and threw his throttles over to a new adjustment in the hope of getting a faster ascent. I saw him jerk at other levers, and the sliding weights ran back with such frightful rapidity that we were almost thrown from our holds, and it seemed to me that the nose of the big craft was pointed directly upward. 'Hang on! Hang on!' he shouted, as he gave them another adjustment, and then, 'Run forward all of you, quick! I haven't got the hang of it yet!'

"We did as he instructed, and that threatened disaster was overcome. He gave the planes another tilt and just then behind us we heard a great explosion. The American, in all that whine of bullets, shouted with glee.

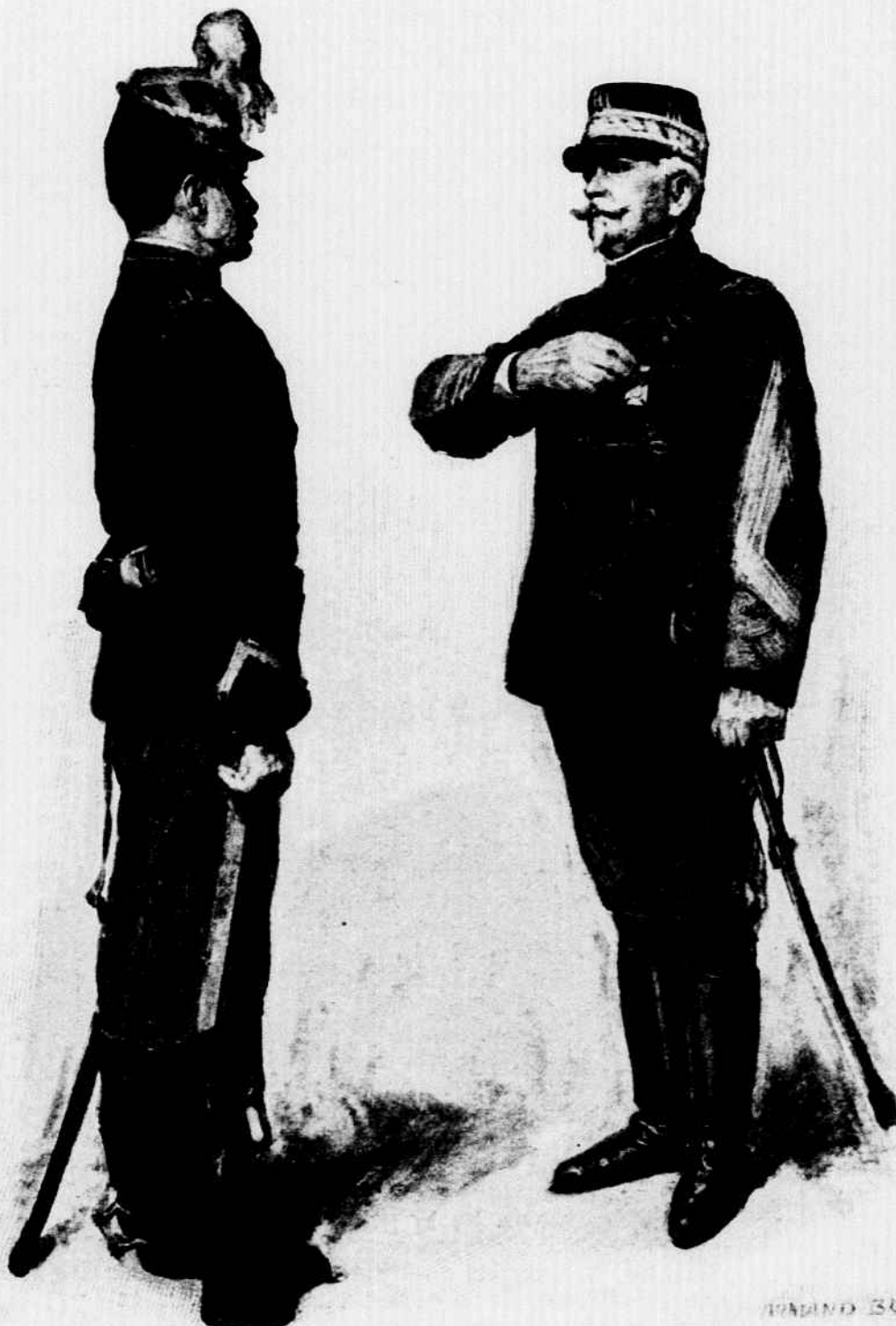
"That's what kept me so long," he yelled. 'I tamped a cylinder of the other dirigible with dynamite and caps. It blew up!'

"His work had wrecked their last dirigible beyond repair! Since that time I have sworn to your countrymen's resource and forethought.

"A sky gun let loose and an explosive shell broke high above our heads. Another exploded at such close range that we shivered and wobbled with the air waves, and still another badly aimed shrilled up through the fog. The lowering cloud banks were waiting to shield us. Safety lay within those next hundred meters of altitude when we should be concealed from that storm of fire that was leaping and tearing at us, after which it would be merely a question of whether we had gas enough left in unbroken compartments to carry us out across that maddened mob of Germans who, like a lot of wildly disturbed ants, were surging below. The fog swallowed us from view and I was hanging to the guard rail like grim death just as this happened." The Colonel held up his hand to view.

YES, it was there I lost a finger. I used emphatic language and was binding it up when, above the hum of the motors, the explosion of the exhaust, and the hiss of escaping gas, I heard a sharp exclamation from amidships and saw that Brownelle had crumpled back against his seat. I began to edge toward him, when I saw him reach over with his left hand and catch the plane lever. I reached him and shouted, 'Are you hit?'

"He stopped work only long enough to point at his right arm, which was hanging limply by his side. A bullet had ripped through at the elbow and gone out at the shoulder. I bent over him in an agony of sympathy; for his fearlessness had won my affection. In the dim light I could see that his face was distorted with pain and determination. He yelled to me to get back and help trim the dirigible with my weight. Reluctantly I did



"Frederic Brownelle. I Am Authorized to Offer You a Reward in Gold or This!"

Continued on page 17

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The Bauble

Continued from page 5

so and only half realizing that we were still climbing upward into the heavens as if bent on forever leaving the earth.

"The firing had almost ceased. We were enveloped in a hazy world of our own. The noise of angry cries died away. Above us the clouds lightened to a pallid gray, and then in a moment more we leaped beyond them into a moonlit world. The fog banks through which we had passed had become a white and crested sea which rolled in stately, slow billows as far as the eye could reach. The stars seemed near and clear and bright. It was as if we had invaded a mystic realm of peaceful beauty and left war and its panoplies of horror or glory behind. The machine perceptibly righted and swung out toward the north, that north in which lay the legions of France—and friends!

I HURRIED back to the figure which had almost collapsed beside the sputtering motors. Now I could see his face quite plainly. It was white, grim, and hard set. Captain Brownelle was swaying dizzily and working on nothing but sheer nerve and resolution. I got down beside him and asked him if Villalon and Lepard could come amidships. He nodded assent. I gave him a big drink of brandy, and he revived and gave hurried explanations to Villalon how to guide the big cigar shaped bag that swung in wrinkled streaks above us.

"If I go out," the American said, "keep the engines going, and if she settles elevate the planes. We've got to win! I tell you we've got to win!"

"We ripped the coat from his back, up there in the air, just above that white moonlit field, and as best we could bound his wounds. He flinched now and then under our hurried ministrations, and all the time I heard the good Lepard cursing the Germans and the man who had aimed that bullet. I put my own coat over his shoulders, and Lepard held him up when he began to direct Villalon how to handle the levers for a descent.

"We groped slowly downward into the fog again, certain now that we were above the armies of France. The sounds of a camp came to us; but this time the shouts were in the tongue of our beloved land. I leaned far over and warned them against shooting. We had been shot at enough for one night! Gradually we slipped downward to the ground, which came gently up to meet us.

"Shut her off, Villalon! There—that lever—so!" I heard Brownelle call, and then I leaned toward him as we struck.

"He had doubled over into Lepard's arms—unconscious. His splendid fight was over. We had won! From the turmoil of cheers, the inrush of officers, the shouts of congratulation, and the sudden chorus of a song howled exuberantly from some of my old men of the *chasseurs d'Afrique*, the American derived no elation. For him the whole world had swept out on as silent a sea as that bank of white over which we had flown to the victorious end of our adventure.

WE broke the crowd around us and followed the stretcher on which lay our gallant companion as it was carried to the hospital. There we found that another bullet he had not mentioned had caught him in the body. We three comrades, scarred and gray in the service of many fields and many hazardous enterprises, stood above the surgeons who dressed his wounds, desperately anxious for some reassuring word. They told us that he would probably live, and we went to the tent of General Merthier to report.

"We tramped together in a strange and downcast silence. For the moment the fact that we had dealt the hardest conceivable blow to the enemy was not uppermost. Our minds and sympathies were with the white faced flotsam from a foreign army who had brought us on to this point of achievement, the silent, pallid hulk of a man resting on a hospital cot—our new comrade!

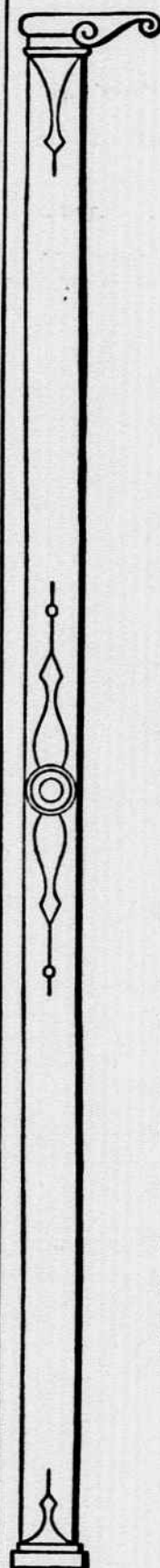
"We declined the praise the General in a voluble outburst of enthusiasm started to bestow upon us.

"The man to whom the thanks are due, *mon General*, Villalon said quietly, 'is an American. Back there—in a hospital tent.' He jerked a thumb over his shoulder as if the vision of the cot was discernible.

"I don't know how we three ever gave a clear account of that story, for it was one of broken sentences; but before our halting, blundering speech was through old Merthier, grim and wise, had the story of the man who had relinquished a commission for honor's sake and knew that without him we could not have delivered so sturdy a blow for our country's cause.

HAVE you ever seen the cross of the Legion of Honor pinned on a man's breast in front of an army on parade? It is a stirring sight, one that makes the heart beat hard and leads lean souls to the edge of a sight of glory. It was nearly a month later and a hundred miles away when they gave us ours. The valiant Brownelle had recovered and came a pale convalescent from the tents, with us Captains Three, all of us who were to receive the higher badge of service.

"I said that General Merthier was a blunderer. He was more than that; he was a man who could not read the hearts of the chivalrous. But he undoubtedly tried to do his best. One after the other of us came forward in the midst of that blare of martial music and received our decoration. The American came last. Merthier swelled perceptibly; but had the good taste to speak so that none but those of his staff



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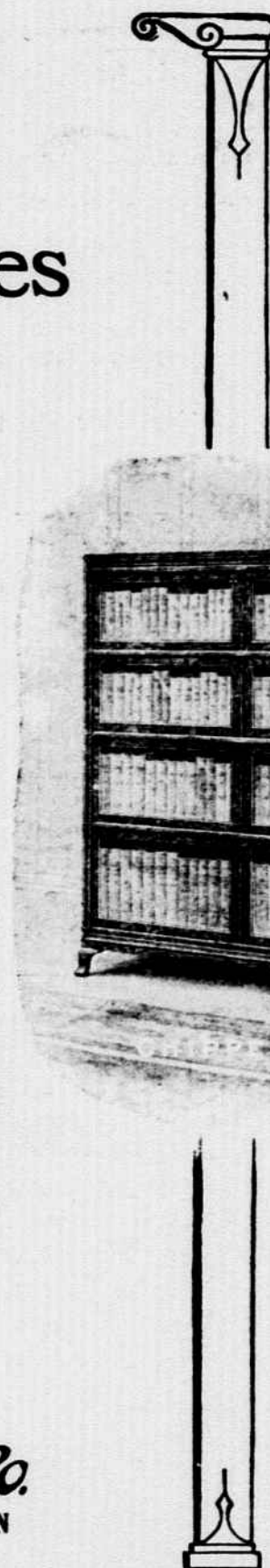
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behind heard his words. Hold on! Perhaps he did not blunder so badly as I have sometimes thought. Perhaps he was testing this man from across the seas. I wonder?

"Frederic Brownelle," he said, 'you come from a country that does not reward men as we do with a decoration. To you the latter might be merely a bauble. I am authorized by a grateful Ministry of War to offer you a substantial reward in gold for your splendid service and your wounds, or—this!' His hand slipped up to the cross on his own breast, which he loosened and held hesitatingly in his fingers. 'I am also authorized to tell you that once upon a time the Americans bestowed a title upon one of my countrymen, a chivalrous gentleman of freedom named Lafayette, and that France cannot be outdone in magnanimity. You are to-day given a commission of your rank. You are a Captain in the army of France!'

COLONEL DUNOIS cleared his throat and called loudly for service. The fat angora cats and the equally well fed proprietress awoke. I, leaning breathlessly forward, waited in vain for him to explain one unfinished point of his tale.

"But the Captain—what of the Captain?" I almost whispered. "Which did he choose? The gold of France or—"

"How can you ask?" he broke in fiercely. "How can you ask? He was a soldier of France in truth! He chose the bauble!"

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